

Cal Poly cleans up

Corporation gives \$5.6M to fund site reclamation work

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Unocal Corporation gave Cal Poly \$5.6 million Thursday to finance research and technology for restoring petroleum-contaminated sites, particularly its own Guadalupe oil field.

The donation is one of the largest the university has ever received, Cal Poly President Warren Baker said during a morning ceremony on campus that drew more than 100 Cal Poly and Unocal executives.

The money will go into the College of Science and Mathematics Environmental Biotechnology Institute and enhance the existing partnership between the college and the oil company, Baker said.

EBI is working with Unocal to find ways to clean up the massive petroleum spill at the oil field. Between 8.5 and 20 million gallons of petroleum products have been spilled at the Guadalupe site, but there is no known way to clean up the contamination without destroying the fragile coastal dune habitat at the oil field.

During Thursday's ceremony, Baker thanked Unocal for already involving Poly faculty and students in research to clean up the dunes. Baker also commended the company for its remediation work in Avila Beach, where the whole town is being rebuilt.

Because of its research assistance potential, said Baker, "this gift provides a lasting legacy ... that will have worldwide applications."

Unocal helped launch the EBI with a \$1.3 million grant in 1996. The latest donation will include \$2 million for construction of EBI facilities in the university's anticipated new science and mathematics building, \$1.5 million over three years to continue research at the Guadalupe field, and \$1 million to endow a chair, occupied by microbiology professor Raul Cano, in environmental sciences.

"He's internationally recognized as a scientist and dedicated educator," Baker said of Cano, who is currently directing a team of faculty and students conducting research in Unocal's Guadalupe oil field to improve technology called bioremediation. "He's a model for us all."

Cano, a specialist in paleobiology and molecular evolution, gained notice in 1993 when he discovered and extracted Dinosaur-Age DNA from insects preserved in amber.

He was grateful for the Unocal gift. "When I left Cuba in 1962," said Cano, "I never expected my life was going to be this good."

Mark Smith, Unocal's vice president for real estate, remediation services and mining operations, acknowledged County Supervisor Chairwoman Peg Pinard "who keeps us in line and doing the right thing."

Pinard said just before the ceremony that she thinks the donation is a good way for Unocal to help apologize for all the problems the company's leaks have caused.

"I think Unocal is saying, if we're going to be such a big presence in the community, let's make it a positive one."